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PRIORITY DIRECTOR INFO PRIORITY SAIGON

SECTION ONE OF FOUR

RYBAT

1. TRIP WAS USEFUL AND ENLIGHTENING, THANKS IN LARGE MEASURE TO INVALUABLE ASSISTANCE FROM STATION AND OTHER MISSION COMPONENTS. I VISITED AND DID PROVINCIAL TRAVEL IN I, II AND IV CORPS, TALKED WITH CORPS COMMANDERS, OTHER ARVN OFFICERS, PROVINCE CHIEFS, POLICE OFFICERS AND BROAD SPECTRUM OF US MILITARY AND CIVILIAN OFFICIALS. DID NOT TRAVEL IN III CORPS BUT HAD GOOD SESSIONS WITH OUR OLD AND NEW ROICS. IN SAIGON (IN ADDITION TO STATION OFFICERS) SAW WIDE VARIETY OF PEOPLE INCLUDING THIEU, KY, PRIME MINISTER HUONG, ^{IN}TERIOR MINISTER KHIEM, DGNP DIRECTOR HAI, RIGHT WING CATHOLICS, LEFT WING CATHOLICS, INTELLECTUALS, IN AND OUT POLITICIANS, AND EVEN TRI QUANG. HAD PROFITABLE LONG SESSION WITH GEN. ABRAMS ON 6 JUNE, GOOD VISIT WITH HIS J-2 GEN. DAVIDSON, AND WRAP UP LUNCH WITH AMBASSADORS BUNKER AND BERGER, WHICH ☐ ALSO ATTENDED. FOLLOWING ARE PRINCIPAL IMPRESSIONS AND CONCLUSIONS.

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2. PER YOUR APPRECIATED INSTRUCTIONS, DID NOT GET INTO DETAILS OF CURRENT NUMBERS EXERCISE STIMULATED BY BUNDY AND GEN. TAYLOR. DID, HOWEVER, GO OVER MAJOR ISSUES INVOLVED WITH ABRAMS, DAVIDSON AND BUNKER AND IF YOU APPROVE, WILL TABLE SOME OF OUR MUTUALLY AGREED VIEWS FOR GENERAL TAYLOR'S CONSIDERATION.

 25X1 3. OVERALL CALIBER AND PERFORMANCE OF SAIGON STATION IS OUTSTANDING, HIGHLY THOUGHT OF BY REST OF MISSION, AND DOES GREAT CREDIT. NO VISITOR CAN FAIL BE IMPRESSED BY HIGH DEGREE OF PROFESSIONALISM WHICH MARKS STATION'S PERSONNEL, THEIR DEDICATION TO DUTY AND THEIR EFFECTIVE DISCHARGE OF COMPLEX RESPONSIBILITIES IN TRYING AND OFTEN DANGEROUS CIRCUMSTANCES.

 25X1 4. THOUGH THERE ARE OBVIOUSLY LOCAL VARIATIONS FROM AREA TO AREA, ATTACK ON FIRST AND SECOND ECHELONS OF VIET CONG INFRASTRUCTURE IS GENERALLY PROCEEDING IN ENCOURAGING FASHION (SEE PARAGRAPHS 8 AND 9 BELOW). CONSIDERABLE PROGRESS IS BEING MADE COUNTRYWIDE IN IDENTIFYING KEY CADRE AT HAMLET, VILLAGE AND DISTRICT LEVEL.

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6. AS FOR OVERALL IMPRESSIONS, OUR ADVERSARIES ARE BESET WITH MOUNTING PROBLEMS ENGENDERED BY CASUALTIES, ABRAMS SKILLFUL SPOILING OPERATIONS WHICH ARE RENDERED INCREASINGLY SUCCESSFUL BY EVER BETTER PRIOR INTELLIGENCE, ARC LIGHT STRIKES (DITTO ON IMPROVED EFFECTIVENESS THRU BETTER INTELLIGENCE), SOMEWHAT IMPROVED ARVN PERFORMANCE (IN SOME AREAS), POPULAR DISAFFECTION WITH TET AND POST TET TERRORISM (PLUS IRRITATION AT INCREASED TAXATION AND IMPRESSMENT), AND THE REALLY REMARKABLE STRIDES BEING MADE IN THE ATTACK ON AT LEAST LOWER LEVELS OF INFRASTRUCTURE. ALL OF THIS HAS PRODUCED COMMUNIST PERFORMANCE SHORTFALLS, FRUSTRATED PLANS, AND DECLINING MORALE IN AT LEAST SOME AREAS.

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OUR ADVERSARIES ARE NONETHELESS STILL FORMIDABLE AND ARE ALMOST CERTAINLY PLANNING MAJOR UPSURGE OF OFFENSIVE ACTIVITY IN THE VERY NEAR FUTURE. I PERSONALLY EXPECT DANANG BE ATTACKED ANY TIME, BELIEVE SAIGON WILL BE HIT HARD WITHIN NEXT TWO WEEKS, AND ANTICIPATE ANCILLARY ATTACKS ON CHU LAI, QUANG TRI AND HOI AN IN I CORPS AND TAY NINH AND OTHER EXPOSED PROVINCE TOWNS IN III CORPS. DOUBT IF THERE WILL BE MUCH BESIDES HARRASSMENT IN II AND IV CORPS. VC WILL ALMOST CERTAINLY BE REPULSED BUT THEY WILL MAKE LOTS OF NOISE AND COULD SCORE SOME LIMITED SUCCESSES, PARTICULARLY IN OUTLYING AREAS. GENERAL LAM, THE REFRESHINGLY PERCEPTIVE I CORPS COMMANDER, HIT IT ABOUT RIGHT WHEN (SPEAKING FOR DANANG) HE SAID HE WAS CERTAIN HE COULD KEEP VC FROM TAKING CITY BUT NOT CERTAIN HE COULD PREVENT THEIR SLIPPING IN SMALL GROUPS CAPABLE OF CAUSING CONSIDERABLE TROUBLE BEFORE THEY WERE KILLED OR CAPTURED.

S E C R E T

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PAGE 6 S E C R E T

7. I DID NOT PARTICIPATE IN DRAFTING OF

 BUT AM IN GENERAL AGREEMENT WITH ITS CONCLUSIONS.

RECENT DOWNTURN IN ENEMY ACTIVITY WAS ALMOST CERTAINLY
 DICTATED BY NEED FOR REGROUPMENT, REFITTING AND OTHER
 PREPARATIONS FOR NEW OFFENSIVE. THUS RECENT COMMUNIST
 ACTIVITY PATTERNS WERE NOT ADOPTED AS CONCILIATORY OR
 DEESCALATING GESTURES, THOUGH HANOI IS DOUBTLESS DELIGHTED FOR
 THEM TO BE SO INTERPRETED ABROAD SINCE THIS IMPROVES HANOI'S
 IMAGE AND GENERATES POLITICAL MILEAGE OUT OF COURSE OF ACTION
 HANOI ACTUALLY EMBARKED ON AS ESSENTIAL
 PRELUDE TO INTENSIFIED STRUGGLE. THOUGH ATTACK
 INDICATORS ARE RAPIDLY MOVING IN VIETNAM, HANOI COULD
 PROBABLY STILL ABORT OR DELAY AT LEAST THE MAJOR
 ASSAULTS IF CHANGES IN INTERNATIONAL POLITICAL CLIMATE
 MADE THIS SEEM ADVISABLE. DESPITE A FEW COUNTER CURRENTS,
 HOWEVER, WEIGHT OF PRESENTLY AVAILABLE EVIDENCE STRONGLY

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SUGGESTS THAT MAJOR ATTACKS ARE IMMINENT.

8. ON OUR SIDE, THERE IS WIDE VARIATION FROM LOCALE TO LOCALE, BUT I GENERALLY FOUND THE PROVINCIAL PICTURE ^{RE} LESS BLEAK THAN ANTICIPATED ^{AND} ~~AND~~ HENCE, ENCOURAGING.

IN ALMOST ALL AREAS WE SEEM AT LEAST TO HAVE RECOVERED FROM TET AND IN SOME PLACES ARE DOING RATHER BETTER THAN THAT. WHERE RD TEAMS ARE ASSIGNED RESPONSIBILITIES BEARING SOME RECOGNIZABLE RESEMBLANCE TO THOSE FOR WHICH THEY WERE TRAINED, THEIR PERFORMANCE IS GENERALLY ADEQUATE OR BETTER AND IN CASE OF A FEW INDIVIDUAL TEAMS, OUTSTANDING. WHERE TEAMS ARE USED AS OUTER FRINGE SECURITY UNITS THEY ARE UNDERSTANDABLY NOT VERY EFFECTIVE, ALWAYS ALLOWING FOR LOCAL VARIATION, THE PRUS ARE PERFORMING EFFECTIVELY (OFTEN VERY EFFECTIVELY) COUNTRY WIDE. THE COUNTRY WIDE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE STATIC CENSUS GRIEVANCE PROGRAM AS A POLITICAL ACTION VEHICLE IS OPENED ^{FLY} ^U ~~U~~ SERIOUS QUESTION,

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9. NOW THAT THE WORD HAS COME DOWN THRU ^{U7}GVN CHANNELS UNMISTAKABLY LOUD AND CLEAR, PHOENIX IS SWIFTLY BECOMING ¹⁶BRIGHTEST SOOT ON PROVINCIAL SCENE. NATURALLY NOT ALL OF THE MUSHROOMING DIOCCS ARE YET WORTHY OF NAME, BUT THANKS TO ALL THAT PHOENIX INVOLVES AND HAS STIMULATED WE ARE NOW LIGHT YEARS AHEAD OF WHERE WE USED TO BE ON LOCAL, HARD VCI INFO AND FURTHER OVERALL PROGRESS IN THIS VITAL SPHERE IS ENCOURAGINGLY BRISK.

10. CRITICAL PROVINCIAL PROBLEM REMAINS, AS ALWAYS, FIRST AND SECOND ECHELON LEADERSHIP (PF PLATOON LEADER THRU DISTRICT AND PROVINCE CHIEF). WHERE THIS IS GOOD, GOOD THINGS HAPPEN; WHERE IT IS BAD, SO TOO IS LOCAL SITUATION. ADJOINING I CORPS PROVINCES OF QUANG NAM (SOFT) AND QUANG TIN (MOST ENCOURAGING) PROVIDE AN EXCELLENT PARALLEL ILLUSTRATION OF THIS POINT. QUANG TIN, INCIDENTALLY, PROVIDED A STRIKING EXAMPLE OF WHAT ONE GOOD, GUTSY DISTRICT CHIEF CAN ACCOMPLISH IN SHORT SPAN OF TIME (EIGHT MONTHS) IN A DISTRICT

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PAGE 9 S E C R E T

(THINH BAN) PREVIOUSLY CONSIDERED HOPELESS FOR MANY REASONS (INCLUDING FREQUENT PRESENCE OR PROXIMITY OF THE 2ND NVA). MY OWN BELIEF (SHARED, I FOUND, BY PROVINCE CHIEFS AND OTHERS WHO WERE THEMSELVES GOOD LOCAL LEADERS) IS THAT LOCAL LEADERSHIP PROBLEM IS NOT GOING TO BE SOLVED UNTIL THE GVN BEGINS TAPPING THE POOL OUR ADVERSARIES HAVE ALWAYS DRAWN ON SO PROFITABLY FOR JUST THIS PURPOSE: BRIGHT PEASANT YOUTHS WHO NEVER DARKENED THE DOOR OF ANY LYCEE. A SYSTEMATIC GVN EXPLOITATION OF THIS TALENT RESOURCE COULD, I AM CONVINCED, PRODUCE DRAMATIC RESULTS IN VERY SHORT SPAN OF TIME.

11. IN SAIGON, THIEU STEADILY STRENGTHENS HIS POSITION AND ACTS MORE LIKE AN EFFECTIVE PRESIDENT WITH EVERY PASSING DAY. THIEU'S INCREASINGLY EVIDENT PRIMACY HAS TAKEN AT LEAST TEMPORARY CARE OF MATTERS SUCH AS THE FORMER THIEU KY PROBLEM. POLITICAL SURFACE IS REASONABLY CALM BUT BENEATH THIS SURFACE THINGS ON WHICH WE SHOULD KEEP A WATCHFUL EYE ARE BEGINNING TO STIR. VIETNAMESE POLITICS ARE HEAVILY PERMEATED WITH AIR OF MALAISE AND WORRIED UNCERTAINTY WHICH VIRTUALLY

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EVERY VIETNAMESE I TALKED TO SAID WAS CAUSED BY
LACK OF CLARITY IN AMERICAN POLICY AND INTENTIONS.

[REDACTED] DID MUCH TO DISPEL THIS MALAISE (AT LEAST
TEMPORARILY) AMONG KEY LEADERS THEMSELVES. IT ALSO
HELPED WITH SAIGON POLITICOS (AMATEUR AND PROFESSIONAL)
BUT TO A CONSIDERABLY LESSER EXTENT. THIEU'S PATTERN
OF RECENT APPOINTMENTS PLUS HIS PENCHANT (I THINK
UNCONSCIOUS) FOR LAPSING INTO DIEM ERA STYLES OF SPEECH HAS
STARTED MANY TONGUES WAGGING ABOUT RETURN OF CAN LAOISM,
A NOT SO TRIVIAL POINT BECAUSE THE 1963 COUP IS STILL
A STRONG (THOUGH LATENT) EMOTIONAL ISSUE. TRI QUANG,
NATURALLY, IS ALREADY CONVINCED THAT THIEU IS DIEM REINCARNATED
AND THAT HE IS DETERMINED TO DO IN THE BUDDHISTS (I.E. TRI
QUANG) AS SOON AS POSSIBLE. MILITANT BUDDHIST FANATICISM ON
THIS SCORE CONSTITUTES NO IMMEDIATE THREAT TO STABILITY,
BUT THAT COULD CHANGE IF TRI QUANG WERE EVER HANDED A
REAL CONCRETE ISSUE TO WORK ON. MANY MILITARY OFFICERS
(PARTICULARLY THOSE WHO CARRIED OUT THE
1963 COUP AND BENEFITED THE MOST THEREFROM)
ARE SOMEWHAT EDGY ABOUT THE RETURN OF THE ANCIENT

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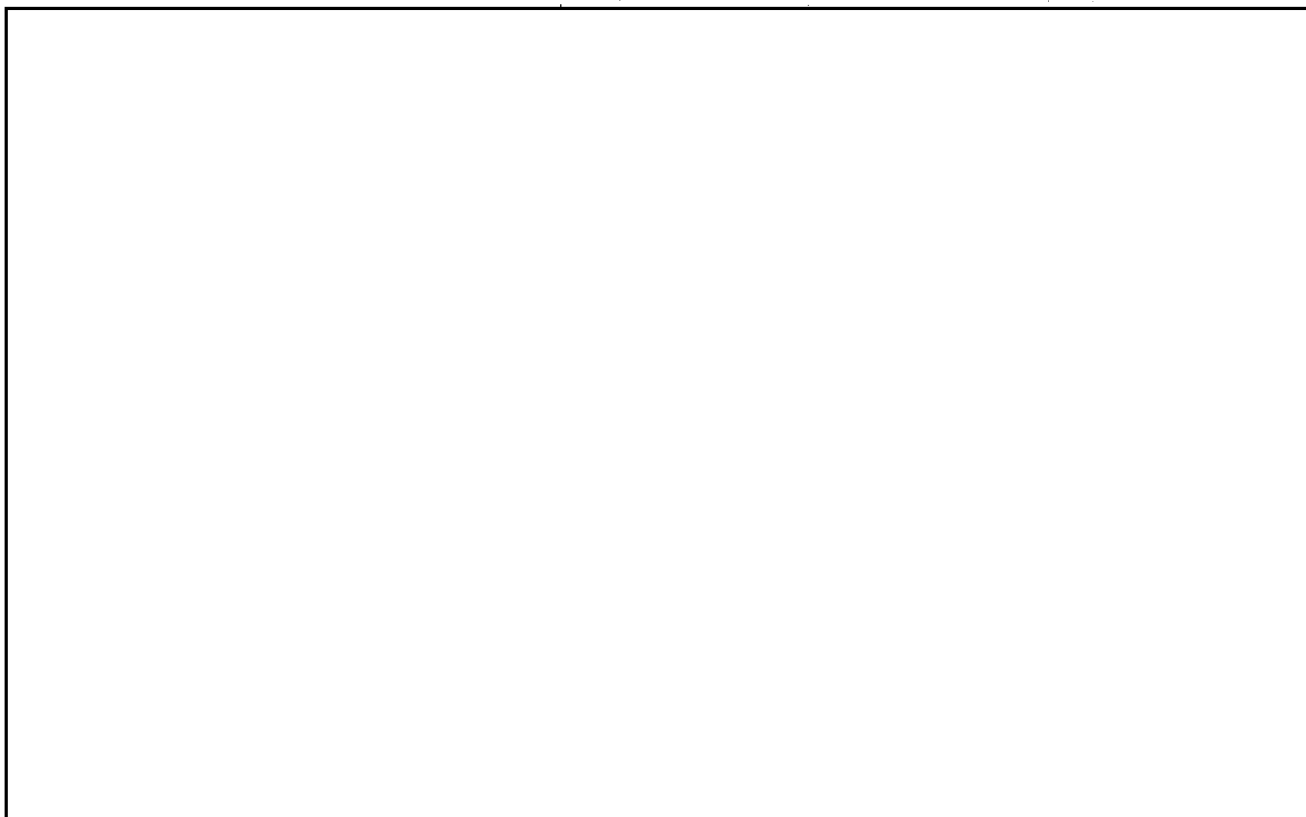
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REGIME, INCREASINGLY CONCERNED ABOUT THIEU'S CONSTANCY IN
COMBATting COMMUNISM AND, OF COURSE, QUITE UNEASY
ABOUT THEIR OWN FUTURE UNDER THIEU'S INCREASINGLY
POWERFUL HANDS.

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13. EVEN DESCRIBING THE ATTITUDES OUTLINED IN TWO PRECEDING PARAGRAPHS IMPLICITLY EXAGGERATES THEIR PRESENT OR IMMEDIATE IMPORTANCE. THESE ARE ALL POSSIBLE CAUSES OF FUTURE DIFFICULTY, NOT CURRENT CONCERNS. ON THE WHOLE, DESPITE REAL COMMUNIST MENACE AND EMOTIONAL WORRIES ABOUT AMERICAN POLICY, I FOUND POLITICAL ATMOSPHERE IN SAIGON AT LEAST MOMENTARILY HEALTHIER THAN IT HAS BEEN IN OVER A DECADE. VIETNAMESE MOODS ARE MERCURIAL, BUT ONCE REPPRESSED OR TABOO THOUGHTS AND IDEAS -- PEACE, SETTLEMENT, EVEN HAZY NOTIONS OF VICTORY IN A FINITE TIME FRAME -- ARE NOW TALKED ABOUT AND OUT IN OPEN. THE LIGHT OF DAY HELPS DISPEL AT LEAST SOME OF THEIR MYSTERY. THIEU'S GOVT MAY BE STRONGLY LIKED BY ONLY A FEW AND DISTRUSTED (IN SOME MEASURE) BY MANY. IT IS INCLINED (I THINK DANGEROUSLY BUT NOT IRREMEADIABLY SO) TO APPROACH VIETNAM'S PROBLEMS WITH THE SAME CONCEPTS THAT PERMITTED THESE PROBLEMS TO REACH THEIR PRESENT CRISIS PROPORTIONS, BUT FOR THE TIME BEING AT LEAST THIEU'S GOVT IS GOVERNING.

14. ON BALANCE, I THINK I CAN WRITE YOU TWO BROAD

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SCENARIOS, ONE FAIRLY ENCOURAGING, ONE DISMAL, AND BOTH LOADED WITH CONTINGENT VARIABLES. IF THE US REMAINS FIRM (WHICH DOES NOT MEAN OBDURATED) AT PARIS AND IF OUR FORTHCOMING ELECTORAL CAMPAIGN DOES NOT CONVINCE OUR VIETNAMESE ALLIES THAT AMERICA HAS LOST TOUCH WITH VIETNAMESE REALITY, IF THE COMMUNISTS ATTACKS GET NO FURTHER THAN THEY GOT AT MINI-TET, IF THIEU'S GOVT SUSTAINS AT LEAST ITS CURRENT LEVEL OF PERFORMANCE AND AVOIDS SPARKING UNNECESSARY CRISES IN THE NON-COMMUNIST RANKS, IF WE DO NOT RETROGRADE IN THE PROVINCES, AND IF PHOENIX CONTINUES TO FULFILL ITS INITIAL PROMISE -- IN SHORT IF OVER THE NEXT SIX TO NINE MONTHS CURRENT COMMUNIST PROBLEMS CONTINUE AND OUR ADVERSARIES HAVE NOTHING MORE TO SHOW FOR THEIR MAXIMUM EFFORT THAN THEY HAVE TODAY, DESPITE THEIR EXHORTATIONS AND GOLDEN PROMISES TO THEIR CADRES OF IMMINENT VICTORY -- THEN I THINK OUR ADVERSARIES WILL FIND THEMSELVES FACED NOT ONLY WITH MORALE BUT WITH SEVERE INTERNAL DISCIPLINE PROBLEMS. UNDER SUCH CIRCUMSTANCES THERE

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WOULD BE A RECIPROCAL INTERACTION BETWEEN LOWERING VC EXPECTATIONS AND RISING GVN CONFIDENCE THAT COULD QUICKLY CHANGE VIETNAM'S WHOLE ATMOSPHERE. HANOI COULD STILL SEND PAVN UNITS SOUTH TO BE CHEWED UP BY THE ALLIED ARMIES, AND THE 7TH AIR FORCE, BUT I DOUBT IF HANOI WOULD CONSIDER THIS A PROFITABLE COURSE OF ACTION TO PURSUE SINCE FURTHER CONVENTIONALIZATION OF WAR WOULD MEAN LEADING DIRECTLY TO OUR STRONG SUIT (CONVENTIONAL ARMS). AT THIS POINT MANY INTERESTING VISTAS, NOW DIFFICULT TO DESCRIBE, WOULD BEGIN TO OPEN. SUCH DEVELOPMENTS COULD LEAD, NOT PERHAPS TO TOTAL VICTORY, BUT AT LEAST TO SOLUTION SOLIDLY ON CREDIT SIDE OF OUR LEDGER.

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15. HANOI ALMOST CERTAINLY PERCEIVES THE (FOR IT) LATENT DANGERS OUTLINED ABOVE. HENCE IT IS AND WILL BE DEVOTING MULTIPLE MAXIMUM EFFORT TO MAKE THINGS GO OTHER WAY BY UNRAVELLING GVN THRU URBAN ATTACKS, FOMENTING STRIFE AND DISCORD AMONG NON-COMMUNIST GROUPS, ENDEAVORING TO MANEUVER IN PARIS TO ENGENDER FROM US A RESPONSE THAT SPOOKS THE ALREADY TALK-SHY VIETNAMESE, OR SOME COMBINATION OF THESE AND OTHER PRESSURES. IF A SIZEABLE PROPORTION OF VIETNAMESE URBAN BODY POLITIC SHOULD DECIDE (FOR WHATEVER REASON) THAT COALITION IS JUST AROUND THE CORNER AT ANY POINT WITHIN MY SIX TO NINE MONTHS TIME FRAME, WE ARE IN FOR BAD TROUBLE. I BELIEVE MAJORITY OF POLITICALLY CONSCIOUS VIETNAMESE ARE OPPOSED TO CONCEPT OF COMMUNIST RULE. I ALSO BELIEVE MOST VIETNAMESE THINK COALITION (INEVITABLY) MEANS COMMUNIST RULE. I AM CERTAIN MANY RVNAF AND POLICE

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OFFICERS, CIVIL SERVANTS AND OTHERS WHO HAVE FOUGHT THE VC FOR OVER A DECADE, MANY CATHOLICS WHO BELIEVE THEMSELVES ALREADY IN HO'S BLACK BOOK FOR VOTING WITH THEIR FEET, AND MANY OTHERS WHO HAVE SUPPORTED THE GVN ARE UNSHAKEABLY CONVINCED THAT THEIR THROATS WILL BE SLIT THE DAY AFTER A COALITION GOVT IS INSTALLED, ALONG WITH THE THROATS OF THEIR PARENTS, WIVES AND CHILDREN.

IS. VISCERAL TERROR SELDOM PRODUCES RATIONAL POLITICAL ACTION. IF THE BELIEF THAT COALITION IS IMMINENT EVER GETS SERIOUSLY ABOARD, I BELIEVE MANY FROM THE CIRCLES ENUMERATED ABOVE WOULD DECIDE THAT SINCE THEY ARE GOING TO DIE ANYWAY, BETTER TO DIE FIGHTING AND IN THE PROCESS DESTROY THEIR BETRAYER (I.E. THIEU AND HIS GOVT). IN SUCH CIRCUMSTANCES, THESE JACOBINS OF THE RIGHT WOULD PROBABLY BE JOINED BY MILITANT BUDDHISTS ANXIOUS TO PARTICIPATE IN ATTACK AGAINST THOSE WHO HAVE "BETRAYED" THE 1963 REVOLUTION. (KY, INCIDENTALLY, MAY BE WAITING FOR JUST SUCH A MOMENT TO GET HIS REVENGE). IF ANYTHING LIKE THIS EVER CAME TO PASS, GEN. ABRAMS WOULD PROBABLY HAVE TO MOVE IN AT LEAST ONE US DIVISION TO RESTORE

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ORDER IN SAIGON. THE INTERNATIONAL POLITICAL IMPACT OF ANY ACTION SUCH AS THAT DOES NOT HAVE TO BE SPELLED OUT.

17. I DO NOT BELIEVE THE SHAPE OF VIETNAM IN SPRING OF 1969 IS IRREVOCABLY DETERMINED ON THIS SEVENTH DAY OF AUGUST 1968, HENCE ESTIMATES ARE HARD TO MAKE. MY HAPPIER SCENARIO IS ADMITTEDLY OPTIMISTIC, BUT I DO NOT BELIEVE IT UNATTAINABLE, GIVEN STEADY NERVES, SOME LUCK, AND A GREAT DEAL OF GOOD MANAGEMENT. THE EVOLUTION OF THE DARKER SCENARIO WILL BE AN EVER PRESENT DANGER FOR WHOSE INITIAL SIGNS THE US INTELLIGENCE COMMUNITY WILL HAVE TO BE CONSTANTLY ALERT.

18. ABOVE ARE MY PERSONAL CONCLUSIONS BUT THEY HAVE BEEN CAREFULLY REVIEWED WITH GEN. ABRAMS, AND AMBASSADOR BUNKER, ALL OF WHOM INDICATED THEIR SUBSTANTIAL AGREEMENT. I REGRET LENGTH OF THIS CABLE BUT WANTED YOU BE ABLE CONSIDER MY CONCLUSIONS BEFORE MORNING OF 9 AUGUST. IS GETTING COPY OF THIS SO HE CAN CABLE ANY COMMENTS SAIGON WISHES MAKE BEFORE MY PFIAB BRIEFING.

25X1 S E C R E T